

Hillsborough Presbyterian Church
Churton & W. Tryon Sts.
Hillsborough
Orange County
North Carolina

HABS No. NC-238

HABS
NC,
68-14142
8 -

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HABS
NC,
68-1410
8-

Historic American Buildings Survey

Name of Structure - Hillsborough Presbyterian Church

Address - NW corner of Churton and West Tryon Sts., on Lot 98 (the Old Town Cemetery Lot), Hillsborough, Hillsborough Township, Orange County, North Carolina.

Present Owner: Trustees of the Hillsborough Presbyterian Church.

Present Occupant: The Hillsborough Presbyterian Church

Present Use: As a church.

Brief Statement of Significance: The oldest Presbyterian church building in North Carolina in which services have been continuously held. Site is one of the most historic plots of ground in North Carolina. Present brick church stands on or nearly on site of pre-Revolutionary Church of England structure used to house historic Third Provincial Congresses (1775), three General Assemblies (1778, 1782, 1783), and the momentous Constitutional Convention (1788), and Science Hall (the school in which William Hooper was interested). Cemetery filled with tombs of some of North Carolina's most illustrious dead: Archibald Murphy, Gov. Wm. A. Graham, William Hooper, James Hogg, Chief Justice Frederick Nash, etc.

Present church building closely associated with Witherspoon, Nash, Kirkland, Strudwick, and Lynch families; also connected with the Burwell and the Nash and Kollock Schools.

Architecturally austere and simple; a fine example of an early Presbyterian brick church.

Date of Erection: Apparently 1816.

Architect: Unknown

Builder, suppliers, etc. - The builder may have been the brickmason, Samuel Hancock, an early member of the church. The name of his associate, and perhaps apprentice, John Berry, is often connected with the church although no proof of any kind exists that Berry had a hand in its building. (Berry would have been only 18 years of age at this time.) Since the building was built from the proceeds of a public lottery and evidently also from the proceeds of a general town subscription, it seems likely that town authorities would have planned the building, let the contracts, etc.

Original Plans, Construction, etc. - The original structure, as shown in the 1835 water-color owned by the Strudwick family, was a simple brick rectangle, almost square, with a hip roof (like many early Virginia churches), and simple double-hung sash windows (see Journal of Society of Architectural Historians, X (1951), 18, for discussion of original building). There was no interior panoling or decoration whatever, no spire or tower. A stove on the south side heated the church.

The original pews, mentioned in the 1816 pew rental lists as being in groups of "north, south, and center," are still in use and still in the original grouping. The slave gallery is still there, for "servants of colour" are among the earliest members of the church.

The bricks, laid in Flemish bond, were almost certainly made locally. The original foundation to the water-table was exposed in the late months of 1963 when a cement overlay (probably applied in 1884) was chipped off, joints repointed, and a cement coating reapplied.

Physical History:

Original and Subsequent Owners:

(Preceding history of Lot 98 is in the files of the Hillsborough Historical Society.)

1. Act of 1810 by the General Assembly of N. C. authorized Commissioners of the Town of Hillsborough to conduct a lottery to raise \$5000 "for the purpose of building a Church for the use of said town." (Local evidence indicates that townspeople initiated a general subscription also.)
2. 1816 - Church evidently built at this date on or nearly on the site of the earlier Church of England structure which burned in the 1790's. Pew rentals for 1816, 1817, 1818, and 1824 are preserved; and they indicate north, south, and central sections of pews. The Presbyterian Church was organized on Sept. 25, 1816, with Rev. John Witherspoon (grandson of the Signer of the Declaration of Independence) as pastor.
3. 1948 - Deed Book 129, 281) - On April 28, 1948, the Town of Hillsborough deeded the lot of ground on which the church stands, 113' north from Tryon St., thence east to the Library Lot, south to Tryon St., and back to the beginning point, to the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church. Thus, after approximately 132 years, the Presbyterians in 1948 owned the ground on which their church stands.

(Note: The history of the adjacent Sessions House on Lot 98 is also in the files of the Hillsborough Historical Society.)

Notes on Alterations and Additions:

There are no records of early alterations. A cement coating was placed over the entire structure, before 1888 according to a notation on the Sanborn Map of 1888.

Notes indicate receipted bills "for labor, lumber, and glass" in the summer of 1892 when the square shingled entrance tower with its distinctive spire was added. (The tower and spire quite evidently were made to match in some degree the existing tower and spire on the old Sessions House, built ca. 1837.) It would seem most likely that the hip roof was altered to an A. roof at that time, too, with the trefoil windows at the rear being cut to match the new one in the tower. The windows may have been given their pointed arches at this time. There are plaster breaks near each one, and the molding surrounding them on the interior is a 19th century molding.

Minor repairs were made in 1928 costing some \$400. This included laying a new (hardwood) floor in the church and in the vestibule.

In 1948 a chancel was added to the east end (by means of a \$1500.00 gift in honor of John Berry), and an educational building was added on the eastern or rear side. This in no way affects the original building.

An examination of the gallery would indicate that it has been altered twice (particularly the staircase leading to it.) It seems likely that a gallery was part of the original structure for "servants of color" were on the earliest church rolls. The original hip roof would have been low, however.

Historical Events Connected with Structure:

Early figures connected with the church are Dr. John Knox Witherspoon (a grandson of the New Jersey Signer and first pastor of the church); Chief Justice Frederick Nash and his wife, Mary Goddard Kollock Nash; Miss Mary Williams ("Polly") Burke, daughter of Governor Thomas Burke; William Kirkland, the merchant, Dr. James Webb and Dr. Edmund Strudwick (founders of the State Medical Society); William J. Bingham of the famous Bingham School, Rev. Robert and Margaret A. Burwell (of the Burwell School, Misses Sarah and Maria Nash (of the Nash and Kollock School), etc. This was the first church built in Hillsborough after the Revolution and it is the oldest Presbyterian church structure in North Carolina in which services have been continuously held.

Important Old Views - (a) 1835 watercolor in Mr. Shepperd Strudwick's collection (now (with Location) in possession of Mr. Edmund Strudwick)

(b) three early postal card views (in possession of Hillsborough Historical Society)

Sources of Information:

(Location) - (1) Deeds records of Orange County in Orange County Court-house, Hillsborough, N. C.; (2) Sessions Books and other records in possession of the Hillsborough Presbyterian Church; (3) article by Eva Ingersoll Gatling, "John Berry of Hillsboro, North Carolina," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, X (March, 1951), 18-22; (4) Francis Nash, Hillsboro, Colonial and Revolutionary (Raleigh, 1903); (5) Letter written by Margaret Yonge Norwood, dated April 20, 1905, in the John de Berniere Hooper Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, U. N. C., Chapel Hill, N. C.; (6) F. B. Sanborn Maps of 1888, (Hillsborough Historical Society); (7) Notes from Edwin M. Lynch and architectural notes from John W. Carr.